

License to Kill

It's been a terrible week. Our elderly cat was diagnosed with kidney failure, our newly built basement flooded with water at the first winter rains, and Yelena was stabbed to death right over our heads.

I didn't hear Yelena's screams, as some of my neighbors did, but was awakened at 4:30 a.m. by the police trying to bash down my door, in the search for her apartment. When they found her one flight up, she was already dead, lying in a pool of blood with stab wounds to her neck and chest, two horrified daughters (aged 7 and 8) at her side, and a boyfriend who claimed that he killed her in self-defense because she attacked him. Never mind that she was a graduate of a battered women's shelter and he had 3 complaints of assault filed against him. Never mind that she was 31, short and of slight build, and he 50, tall and solid. Somehow he had to stab her multiple times to protect himself.

This week we mark International Day of Eliminating Violence Against Women, and I'd like to say a word about the culture of violence that is growing around us, in Israel, in the United States, and everywhere that people and nations that are big and powerful think they can solve problems by raising a knife or gun.

Killing, in all its many forms - crime, political assassination, suicide bombings, and the war against terror - doesn't work. Why not? Because killing ultimately destroys more than it saves. It destroys the victim, it destroys the families of the victims and perpetrators, it destroys masses of innocent bystanders, and it sends a message that violence is legitimate, thereby inviting another round of it.

Ask the Palestinian survivors who lived in the building as the terrorist who had a one-ton bomb dropped on his apartment, and were left to count the loved ones killed by that bomb. Ask the Israeli parents who try to pick up the pieces of their lives after a suicide bomber has gutted a bus. Ask those whose loved ones were wiped out in the Twin Towers. Or the Iraqi children who live in Falluja as the U.S. army gave them a demonstration of bringing democracy to the world.

All killing is a crime. And killing by governments becomes a role model for others. Take Israel as an example, though this could be applied to Palestine, the U.S., or any country whose leaders practice or condone violence.

In the past four years, as the Palestinians justly seek their independence from occupation and Israeli leaders try to prevent it, violence has spiralled on both sides. The results are not only more death in political action, and more

bitterness and hatred, but also more violence in civilian society: In the past four years in Israel, we have had more rape, more killing of women by their male partners, and more violence in schools by children. The overlap between the "war on terror" and increased violence in the streets, homes, and schools is no coincidence.

A culture of violence filters down into society when its leaders use force to resolve problems. This culture of violence - loosening the reins on the use of force - is not an invention of TV and movies (which have certainly overdone it), but begins by personal example of those who influence our values and norms: parents, political leaders, the most powerful nation on earth. What are we to learn when a superpower, with all imaginable means at its disposal, uses violence?

So at a time when we are thinking about how to end violence against women, I submit that you can't wipe it out without also addressing the example set by the state. When power and violence dominate political strategy, governments are issuing a license to kill, and that trickles right down to us and the apartments over our heads.

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Coalition of Women for Peace

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